LAFAYETTE VISTAS

Published by the City of Lafayette

Summer 2008
Vol. 18, No.3

COUNCIL CELEBRATES CITY'S 40TH BIRTHDAY

...But Quashes Sales Tax Measure for November Ballot

July 28th was quite the eventful evening at the Lafayette Community Center.

It started with a gathering to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Lafayette's incorporation. About a dozen former mayors and councilmembers and more than a hundred residents were treated to a surprise visit from the great, great, great, great. . .granddaughter of the American hero and the City's namesake, Le Marquis de Lafayette. She had travelled all the way from Paris and offered warm greetings to the crowd in a delightful French accent.

There was much back-slapping and hugs all around as folks gathered on the outdoor patio to pick up a special birthday edition of the Love Lafayette bumper sticker (get yours at the City offices), sample some killer ice cream cake and reminisce about the old days. It was particularly nice to see Donn Black and Bob Fisher – both of whom were elected in 1968 and served on the very first city council together – standing together and enjoying a laugh.

Once the festivities were over, however, the mood changed dramatically as the current City Council members took their seats and opened a discussion regarding whether to place a local sales tax increment before voters for their consideration in November.

In his staff report introducing the item, City Manager Steven Falk noted that Lafayette has sought, for decades, to address and resolve significant and long term financial problems. Falk noted that:

- **Lafayette faces an unfunded backlog of road repairs totaling approximately $18M** (the exact amount depending on how revenues flow in and commodity prices fluctuate). As a result, about 15% of Lafayette's roads are now considered to be in a failed condition, and more than 4,000 residents live on failed roads. To resolve this problem the City has, during the past decade, twice placed parcel tax measures before voters. Because they were special taxes, each required a 2/3 supermajority vote, and both failed. The last measure, on the Spring 2007 ballot, was favored by 63% of the voters and lost by just 209 votes.

Join us to celebrate Lafayette's 40th birthday at the Art Wine Festival on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2:00pm for free ice cream sandwiches!

- **Lafayette provides the lowest per capita police staffing in Contra Costa County.** The City's police department receives more than 20,000 calls for service each year. This represents, on average, one call every half hour, twenty four hours a day, every day of the year. Meanwhile, due to funding constraints, the City has just two officers on duty during some shifts. When one transports a perpetrator to the Martinez jail, the City is left with just one officer on patrol. This coverage is, by just about any measure, inadequate, and the City Council has twice placed police funding measures before local voters. Both, again, required the 2/3 supermajority and both failed.
- Maintenance for downtown improvements in Lafayette has traditionally been funded by downtown property owners via a local assessment district. The district was put into place more than two decades ago and during the intervening years costs have increased while the assessments have remained flat. As a result, **the City now subsidizes downtown maintenance with an infusion of about $250,000 annually.**

To address this shortfall, the Council last year placed an overlay assessment district proposal before property owners that, if passed, would have fully funded downtown maintenance. The proposal was rejected.

The City's chronic funding shortfalls can be traced all the way back to the City's original incorporation in 1968. Because the City was formed as a low revenue city, it received – and continues to receive – a smaller share of property taxes (approx. 6.5%) than the average California city (11%). This is something that can't be changed and thus leaves Lafayette short compared to many of its neighbors.

The City Council recognized this problem as it opened up the sales tax discussion, with one councilmember noting, "now that we've celebrated Lafayette's birthday, let's see if we can deal with Lafayette's birth defect."

Because the City failed in its five recent efforts to pass a special tax, the City Council last spring asked for a survey to determine voters' interest in and willingness to pay a *general* tax – one that would not require the onerous 2/3 voter approval but could instead be passed by a simple majority.

The poll was completed in June. Godbe Research reported that, based upon completed surveys of 600 voters, a sales tax measure of up to 1% would be favorably received by Lafayette voters. 59% indicated support even after hearing a series of arguments against the measure. With a margin of error of 5.6%, the results suggested that the City might finally be poised to pass a significant funding measure.

Given these encouraging results, the City Council scheduled two public hearings in July to allow the public to chime in on the question, and the meeting on the 28th was the second of the two.

(continued on page 2)

What's Up with Lafayette's Parks?

It's Summertime – and the Living is Easy

Summer means baseball, barbecue and basking in the sun. And Lafayette's 91-acre system of parkland and facilities is the perfect place for all three!

So as to improve our already-wonderful park system, the City has begun preparing a new Parks Master Plan.

The objective is to create a road map for acquiring and developing the park facilities needed to serve the citizens of Lafayette. According to goals and policies established in the General Plan, this means providing five acres of parkland per 1,000 inhabitants which will require the acquisition of an additional 44 acres of City parkland.

The process for updating the Parks Master Plan will include widely-noticed public workshops and other forms of outreach. In the meantime, in 2008-2009 a number of new projects will launch that will contribute to a high quality of life and leisure for Lafayette residents:

Children's Play Area

A brand new children's play area will be built on the south side of the Lafayette Community Park near the ballfields. The existing structure has reached the end of its life and will be replaced with new features offering play experiences for a greater age range as well as for children with mobility challenges.

New Trails

A new trail will be built along a section of city-owned property on Murray Lane that will connect to the north end of the Lafayette Community Park. The trail will receive a crushed granite surface allowing for all-weather use.

Also planned is a new trail that will connect Lafayette to the Palos Colorados development in Moraga. The new trail will be earthen with plank steps in the steepest sections.

Facility Facelifts

A Lafayette Community Center classroom, currently used by the Friends of the Lafayette Library for used book sales, will be completely refurbished after the "Friends" move to the new library. Upon completion, the classroom will accommodate a variety of recreational programs and activities.

In addition, the Community Center roof will be replaced. At 25 years old, the roof is showing its age, not to mention a leak or two in the winter. The new roof will use asphalt shingles to blend in better with the residential neighborhood and include energy efficient upgrades.

Future plans for the Manzanita Room, but still unfunded, include a restroom addition, new doors and windows, removal of the center beams, a bigger stage and a new HVAC system. The room will accommodate a wide range of activities for all ages including tumbling, dog obedience, teen dances, live stage performances, camps, aerobics and much more.

Council Celebrates City's 40th Birthday *(continued from front page)*

Dozens of people attended and there was much discussion. While the Lafayette Homeowners Council opined that voters should be given the choice to tax themselves, opposition to the measure emerged from the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and the Lafayette Taxpayers Association.

Ultimately the Lafayette City Council chose not to put the sales tax measure on the ballot. Council members said organized opposition from the Chamber would have made it too difficult to pass the measure. They also cited the lack of any organized support for the measure and expressed fear that failure on this tax could hurt the prospects for passing a similar measure in the future.

What's Next?

The City's financial situation will thus not change anytime soon. Lafayette still faces an estimated $18M unfunded road problem, provides the fewest number of police officer per capita in Contra Costa County, and will run a $250,000 annual deficit for downtown maintenance.

Compounding the trouble is the fact that the State, too, has massive problems. If the past is any guide, the State may seek to balance its budget by raiding Lafayette's. Thus, in addition to being short on road and police funding, the City must anticipate possible further reductions in revenue received from the State.

The City's costs for services are also increasing. The County, which provides police services to Lafayette through a contract, has recently raised its cost considerably. And, the recently increase in oil prices boosts the City's cost for asphalt – and for patrol car fuel.

These many pieces of bad news could all make for some difficult choices ahead. To prepare for those choices and ensure that the City is operating as efficiently as possible, the Council has asked an all-volunteer Citizens Financial Review Committee to review the City's budget and make recommendations regarding how the City might best use its limited resources. The Council is scheduled to receive preliminary and final recommendations from this Committee in September and December, respectively.

So, while the City's 40th birthday was certainly a happy occasion with many accomplishments to celebrate, it might have been appropriate for the cake to have been served with a side of "Rocky Road" ice cream.

Lafayette Dog Lovers Unite

"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."
— *Roger Caras*

Lafayette residents love their dogs. There are 2700 registered dogs in the City, which suggests that one out of every three households in Lafayette owns a dog. Back in January 2001, in response to a strong public interest in providing a place where these dogs and their owners can play, the Lafayette City Council directed the Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission to research the need, feasibility and practicality of creating an off-leash dog park in Lafayette. The Commission developed guidelines and site criteria for a successful off-leash area that were approved by the City Council (see inset).

Five Guidelines for a Successful Off-Leash Dog Park

1. A dog park should be an off-leash area for dogs and their owners and should not include other recreational uses.
2. The Dog Park needs to be securely contained on all sides either by a sturdy fence or natural barriers.
3. The Dog Park should be located next to a major road where ample public parking is provided.
4. The area should have open, bare, ground with good run off.
5. Users should be encouraged to self-police and clean-up but Public Works will be required to provide regularly scheduled maintenance.

More recently, the Commission conducted a survey asking residents to rank their choices for potential new park uses, and the results indicated that 40% of the respondents listed an off-leash dog park as their first or second priority. In addition, the Lafayette Dog Owners' Group (LDOG) was formed in April, 2007 as a non-profit corporation. It is an all-volunteer organization of Lafayette residents advocating responsible dog ownership, supporting off-leash dog exercise, and serving as a local educational resource to the Lafayette community. At last September's Art & Wine Festival, the group signed up more than 100 enthusiastic community supporters.

The PT&R Commission and LDOG are now actively examining sites for a dog park. Based on the established criteria, the most promising appears to be the old orchard at Olympic Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road. The dog park could be situated between the two parking/staging areas for the Lafayette/Moraga Trail.

This property is currently owned by Contra Costa County, and leased by the East Bay Regional Park District ("EBRPD"). The lease is in force until 2010, with the option to extend it for an additional 10 years. The City is analyzing the feasibility of a dog park at this location, including whether to buy or lease the property.

If you would like to be kept up to date on the progress of this project or would like to get involved with LDOG, please send an email to **lafayettedog@yahoo.com** to get on the mailing list.

Did You Know?

There are 8,900 parcels in Lafayette with a sum total assessed value of $5,000,000,000!

Question:

What do you get when you mix kids, bicycles, dirt, and fearlessness?

Answer:

BMX, or Bicycle Motocross.

Since the 1970's, when a group of nameless California kids were featured in the film, *ON ANY SUNDAY*, BMX riding has gained widespread popularity. There are now more than 60,000 members of the American Bicycle Association (ABA), the national BMX racing organization. And in 2008, BMX racing will enter the **Olympics** for the first time in **Beijing, China.**

BMX enthusiasts have built homemade jumps in Lamorinda wherever they've been able to find a place with enough space and dirt. Creeks, parks and other open space have been the most popular locations.

Unfortunately, in their enthusiastic pursuit of their sport, some bicyclists have chopped down trees and disturbed sensitive wildlife habitats. Last summer, the City removed bike jumps built on City property alongside a section of Las Trampas Creek. Even though the Parks, Trails & Recreation Dept. had installed numerous signs warning people to stay away from the sensitive creek habitat, the bicyclists who created the BMX site with their own hands were still disappointed when the jumps were leveled.

Recognizing the ongoing interest in this sport, the Lafayette Parks, Trails & Recreation Commission is working with local riders to study the feasibility of building a legal BMX site in the Lafayette Community Park. PTR Director Jennifer Russell says, "We're asking local bike jumpers and their parents to get involved so that we can plan, and possibly build, a safe facility in the right spot so as not to destroy sensitive habitats. It is my hope that we get a lot of local support because that's what it takes to make things happen in Lafayette. Just look at the Multi-Sport Rink, the Pétanque Courts, Leigh Creekside Park and Buckeye Fields!"

Lafayette Recreation Program Coordinator Jonathan "Ace" Katayanagi has started a dialog with local riders and volunteered to guide them through the City process. There is at least one city-sanctioned site in Pleasanton which can be a useful model.

If you or someone you know wants to work on this project, please email Parks, Trails & Recreation Director, Jennifer Russell at **jrussell@ci.lafayette.ca.us** or call **925-284-2232**.

Friends of Lafayette Library

There is a certain poetic justice in the fact that used books are helping build the new Lafayette Library & Learning Center. Indeed, the first major gift to the Library came from the Friends when they presented a $750,000 check to the Lafayette City Council.

How did they do it? Well, for decades the Friends of the Lafayette Library has sold "gently used" books for 25¢, 50¢ and occasionally a couple of dollars or more on the first and third Saturday of the month at the Lafayette Community Center. It just shows what saving your pennies can do.

The group has been around for decades. Currently, there are about forty-five volunteers, each with their own area of expertise, who chalk up years of time in the narrow confines of the converted classroom. Their goals? "Find a Home for Every Book" and support the library. Since close to 1,500 books are contributed each week, it is no small challenge. However, the shelves are meticulously categorized by subject, including one book case of foreign language books, CD's, DVD's and, yes, 45's and 78's. There is also a wonderful collection of children's books that is very popular.

Left to right: Roger Falcone, LLLCF Vice President, Jim Cunha, LLLCF Treasurer, Dave Hiden, Treasurer Friends of the Lafayette Library and Kathy Merchant, LLLCF President.

Volunteers do recognize some of the 100 or so regular customers who stop by — if not by name, then by what they like to read. Every couple of months, two Buddhist monks who operate a day care center purchase $150 of books to share with the children in their school. A yachting couple who use the Bay Area as a base drop by before each voyage to pack away $50 worth of reading material for the days at sea.

The Book Room is open for business on the first and third Saturdays of the month at 500 St. Mary's Road from 9am – Noon. Three times a year, the Book Sale travels downtown and twice a year bargain hunters can fill a paper bag in the last hour of the sale for $5. When the new library opens next year, the Book Room will move into its own, specially designed space there. **"Same Friends. Same Great Books. Same Low Prices and Same Mission: Supporting the local Library and Literacy."**

City Directory

For Council Members call: **284-1968**

Council Members

Mike Anderson	**Mayor**
Don Tatzin	**Vice Mayor**
Brandt Andersson	**Council Member**
Carl Anduri	**Council Member**
Carol Federighi	**Council Member**

Messages to **all** Council Members:
cityhall@lovelafayette.org

Administration

General Reception and	**284-1968**
Steven Falk, City Manager	**Fax: 284-3169**
Tracy Robinson, Admin. Srv. Dir.	**299-3227**
Gonzalo Silva, Financial Srv. Mgr.	**299-3213**
Joanne Robbins, City Clerk	**299-3210**

Community Development

Ann Merideth, Director	**299-3218**
Tony Coe, Engineering Srv. Mgr.	**284-1951**
Niroop Srivatsa, Planning Srv. Mgr.	**284-1976**
Ron Lefler, Public Works Srv. Mgr.	**299-3214**
P.W. Hotline (to report problems)	**299-3259**

If you observe illegal dumping in creeks & storm drains or accidental spills on roads, call Contra Costa Hazardous Materials Division 646-2286.

Lamorinda School Bus Program

Juliet Hansen, Program Mgr.	**299-3216**
	Or 299-3215

Parks, Trails and Recreation **284-2232**

Jennifer Russell, Director	
Senior Services	**284-5050**
Teen Programs	**284-5815**

Police Services

Emergency: 24 Hours	**911**
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours	**284-5010**
Police Business Office:	**283-3680**

Anonymous Tipline, Traffic Enforcement, Suggestions & LEARN (Laf. Emergency Action Response Network), 299-3232 X 2205

Fax	**284-3169**
Address	**3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210, Lafayette, CA 94549**
Website:	**www.ci.lafayette.ca.us**

E-MAIL: Council/staff members can be reached via e-mail using this address format:
First Initial + Last Name @lovelafayette.org
Example: SFalk@lovelafayette.org

City of Lafayette
3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210
Lafayette, CA 94549

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lafayette, CA
Permit No. 161

Postal Customer
Lafayette, CA 94549

Printed on Recycled Paper